



Bookplates from the Victor Singer Bookplate Collection. Artists clockwise from top left: Emil Orlik; Fritz Erler; Michel Fingesten; and Frank Brangwyn (copyright David Brangwyn). Pictures Collection, H2015.250

Victor Singer Bookplate Collection

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Acquired 2015-16

In an oral history interview recorded prior to his death in 1998, noted bookplate collector John Gartner described in detail a collection of important international bookplates formerly belonging to Victor Singer, a Jewish refugee from Hitler's Germany.

Since we heard of this collection, my bookplate mentor Edwin Jewell and I had been trying to locate it; in September 2014 it was found in the hands of a rare-book dealer. We jointly purchased the collection of around 3300 bookplates, and began assessing and listing them by artist and country.

Victor Singer (1877–1943) was a successful art merchant from Hamburg, with a significant collection of prints, drawings and *ex libris*. Escaping Nazi Germany in late 1938, he and his wife fled to England and then sailed to Australia, arriving on 6 February 1939. After Singer's death in Melbourne, in September 1943, parts of his print collection were sold to the National Gallery of Victoria but the collection of *ex libris* remained in the family until it was sold some years later.

The collection includes a number of Singer's own personal plates, including one by Anglo-Welsh artist Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956), making a total of 53 works by him. Dr Colin Holden, a Brangwyn collector, greatly admired the work, and was convinced of the collection's historical and artistic significance, which resulted in his generous donation towards its acquisition. He assessed the collection in the following way:

Victor Singer's collection of *ex libris* constitutes a significant collection from several points of view ... It comprises a remarkable wide range of *ex libris* by European artists from the first decades of the 20th century. Its noticeable strength is the representation of artists of broadly Germanic culture ...¹

In addition to Brangwyn, three other 'stars' are represented in the collection: Czech artist Emil Orlík (1870–1932), with 39 plates; German artist Max Klinger (1857–1920), with 19 works; and German artist Michel Fingesten (1884–1943), with 13 plates and a birth announcement.

Funding to acquire the Singer Collection came from three sources: Dr Holden's generous contribution, the State Library Foundation, and a final amount raised by me. That the Singer Collection is housed safely in the State Library is testimony to the generosity of the Foundation and Dr Holden, who sadly died in 2016. It is in a small way a perpetual reminder of his generosity as a scholar and a patron.